

## **BACKGROUND**

In April 1998, during a meeting with the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center (USACFSC), it was decided that two USACFSC programs could benefit from marketing research assistance. Both the Arts and Crafts Program and the Automotive Skills Program were in need of customer-centered information from both users and non-users regarding the identification of the needs and desires of the military community in reference to their respective programs. This information will be used to assist the USACFSC Arts and Crafts Program Manager and the USACFSC Automotive Skills Program Manager in developing their programs for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Information will also be shared with installations to enhance the programs at their level.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In July through December 1998, the USACFSC marketing research specialist conducted a total of 23 focus groups at five Army installations: Fort Sill (5 groups held in July), Fort Drum (4 groups held in July), Fort Riley (6 groups held in August), Fort Hood (3 groups held in September) and Fort Campbell (5 groups held in December). A total of 205 individuals (mainly active duty members, but also spouses, civilians and retirees) participated in the 23 groups. Three different focus group discussion guides were used: 1) Arts and Crafts Users/Non-Users Discussion Guide (at Appendix A); 2) Automotive Skills Users/Non-Users Discussion Guide (at Appendix B); and 3) Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) Discussion Guide (at Appendix C).

Qualitative research, of which focus groups are a part, provides a rich source of information in idea generation, clarifying existing theories, creating hypotheses, and giving direction to future research. Although the focus group participants were drawn from the groups in the population from whom we seek answers, they were not chosen on any statistical basis. Therefore, although the number of participants is quite large, no statistical inferences should be drawn from the results of the discussions held. Several key findings emerged as a result of conducting the focus groups and they follow below.

## **GENERAL FINDINGS**

### **PARTICIPANTS**

The 205 participants' characteristics included the following: they were mainly male (71%); average length of time at their current installation was approximately 3 ½ years; most live on post (53%); and those that live off post live within an average of 4 miles away. A total of 26 of the 205 participants (13%) are members of the BOSS program and the average length of time for membership was just over 1 year.

## **LEISURE TIME**

Disregarding those who claim they don't have any leisure time, participants seem to spend most of their time doing the following: First Tier (most popular in order of preference): fishing, working out, drinking beer/bars/parties, sleeping, spending time with the family, and traveling; Second Tier (alphabetically): arts and crafts, basketball, bowling, dance clubs, dating, gardening, golfing, horseback riding, hunting, Internet, movies, photography, reading, shopping, swimming, volunteering, woodworking, and working on cars; Third Tier (alphabetically): ceramics, college courses, computers, knitting, listening to music, motorcycle riding, painting, pottery, relaxing/hanging out with friends, running, sewing, video games, walking, and water sports/beach/boating; Fourth Tier (least popular alphabetically): aquariums, bible study, biking, carpentry, coaching, cooking, cross stitch, cutting wood, drag racing, drawing, football, herpetology, hiking, lapidary, leather, moonlighting, needle point, parks, skiing, toys, washing car, watching football games, water skiing, writing music, and yard/housework.

Please keep in mind that the Arts and Crafts and Auto Skills activities could possibly be over-represented, since we specifically chose users of both of these programs to participate.

## **QUALITY OF LIFE**

Comments regarding quality of life varied from installation to installation. However, the driving factors that most influence satisfaction across the board were living conditions (barracks/housing), amount and variety of activities available (both on and off post), location (easy access to other cities), available natural resources (lakes/rivers/mountains), access to transportation (isolation issue for young soldiers without vehicles), and the weather.

The biggest negative influence on quality of life for younger, single soldiers is hands down the impression that their benefits are eroding before their eyes. The list of "used to offer"s seemed never-ending, with participants stating that they now get less than they used to – less free time, less activities offered, less benefits in general, etc.

## **SOCIALIZING**

When asked if the installation they are currently assigned to is a good place to socialize, the majority of the respondents disagreed (virtually all of the enlisted, single soldiers disagreed). Interestingly, there was a huge divide between the younger participants and the older ones on this issue. It seems the younger, single soldiers feel that, regardless of the installation, the social climate is more positive for older, married couples with families. Conversely, the older, married couples with families, regardless of the installation, feel the social climate is more positive for the younger, single soldier. One concern across the board is that the "only" activity offered that encourages socializing for the younger soldiers is drinking. There is a distinct perception that there is "nothing else

to do” on post or off post. A feeling of isolation, being in the “middle of nowhere” and having to get off post to find things to do pervades across all groups, regardless of the installation (for the younger participants, mainly). Transportation was again an issue for the younger, enlisted soldiers; many of whom claim to feel “trapped” by their lack of it.

## **RECREATION**

When asked if the installation they are currently assigned to is a good place for recreation, participants’ comments were much more positive. A little better than half agreed with the statement. Things like outdoor recreation, stables, pools, hunting, fishing, sports, and gyms were mentioned frequently as good sources for recreation. Again, there was the feeling by the single soldiers that most activities were more family-oriented. Transportation was again an issue, where enlisted soldiers would admit that activities were available, but that they weren’t convenient and they couldn’t get to them. Lack of time was also an issue regarding recreation.

## **HOBBIES/SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

When asked if the installation they are currently assigned to is a good place for hobbies and skill development, participants’ comments were mixed. Those who agreed, cited the arts and crafts facility (woodworking and ceramics), automotive skills, and the recreation center (cards, ping pong, billiards) as good sources. Those who disagreed, claim there’s nothing to do. However, one explanation may be summed up by the following comment: “The installation has all this great stuff, but nobody knows it’s there.” Lack of information and knowledge about offerings was a recurring theme throughout each set of groups, regardless of the installation.

## **SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

When asked if they feel well-informed about what goes on in Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) in general, or in the Arts and Crafts Center or Automotive Skills Center, specifically, the answer from participants is a resounding NO. Most ignore the traditional avenues of promotion being used: the post newspaper, the post bulletin, the commander’s access TV channel, and the ever-present flyers.

Users of both the Arts and Crafts Center and the Automotive Skills Center do feel very well-informed, but claim it is only because they are in the facilities on a regular basis, and therefore, know what’s going on. Most claim they NEV ER see any advertising, whether they are users or non-users.

The best source of information across the board for all participants whether they are active duty, spouses, civilians or retirees is by far word of mouth. Most people do realize that the information is probably out there if they want to go looking for it, but they are not in search of it, so they don’t see it. Word of mouth is definitely the key to getting information to users and potential users.

For younger, enlisted soldiers, sources of information are basically only 2: the first sergeant in formation and peer word of mouth. They claim they get no information on MWR at in-processing, that this is left up to the unit and the units do nothing. Only two installations have a regularly published MWR newsletter, and although the civilians were familiar with them, the active duty members claimed they don't ever see them or read them.

## **GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are applicable for both the Arts and Crafts Program and the Automotive Skills Program:

\*Participants are involved in varied activities, so capitalize on this by offering some of the activities participants are already involved in in a more structured environment in the Centers. For example, spending time with the family and biking were both listed, so offer things that can be done in relation to these activities. Possibly creating Christmas decorations in the Arts and Crafts Center to capitalize on the family time issue or offering bike maintenance for all bikes in the family in the Automotive Skills Center to capitalize on both activities.

-Offerings are too static now. Create programs based on customers' desires. Have an event monthly or at least once per quarter – something new, different and entertaining. USACFS could possibly highlight an activity of the month or the quarter, complete with a list of materials needed, sample promotional tools and tips for execution.

-Offer short, learn to programs, one day or one weekend (consecutive classes), and participants walk away with a product or a new skill. Could be anything from wreath making in arts and crafts (gathering the materials, making the wreath, attaching the flowers/leaves, etc.) to a basic maintenance class in Automotive Skills (changing your oil, etc.). Again, USACFS could possibly lend assistance here by creating turn-key program outlines.

\*Gardening is increasing in popularity across America as a leisure activity (and fell in the second tier of activities listed by participants). Capitalize on this in the Arts and Crafts Center by offering classes (basic gardening tips, creating flower pots, making hanging plant holders, flower arrangements, wreath creation, etc.) or in the Automotive Skills Center by offering services (lawn mower maintenance, tips on tools to use, etc.). USACFSC program managers and installation managers should stay abreast of new activities, share the information with others, and attempt to offer those activities in the Centers.

\*Socializing and meeting new people was identified as a major problem with many participants. One idea to combat this is to offer a "single's" events at the centers – some sort of pairing of couples to complete tasks – could be incorporated at either Arts and Crafts or Automotive Skills. Arts and Crafts – Valentine's Day would be a perfect time

to implement this one – make and paint a pottery rose, etc. Automotive skills – ½ could be proficient in changing their own oil, the other half not – pair them up and you’ve got a whole new program to promote. Again, USACFSC could assist by creating a list of suggested programs to offer in this area.

\*All participants, but especially the enlisted soldiers, complain of lack of activities being offered to them. This needs to be combated, as in some cases it isn’t truly a lack of activities being offered, just a lack of promotion of those activities. You may have the greatest program in the world, but if customers don’t know about it, they can’t participate! Promotion is critical!

- Develop a “newcomer’s” packet outlining all MWR offerings at each installation and distribute them as new soldiers, spouses, civilians, and retirees enter the area. This is something that should be done at the installation level for all MWR offerings. However, this could also possibly be tackled at the USACFSC level by developing a generic brochure outlining the Arts and Crafts and Automotive Skills programs that could be inserted into installation packets.

- Use a variety of promotional tools to reach your customers. Don’t rely solely on bulletin boards, the bulletin or flyers. In many instances, the flyers and bulletins are not reaching all customers or customers aren’t reading them. Use all of the tools at your disposal. Here, again, USACFSC may be able to employ the assistance of the graphic artist at the Headquarters to produce general promotional tools for your programs.

- When using a regular publication, like the bulletin or post newspaper, try to get the back page or some other standard position every time, so that customers will know where to look for your program (or general MWR) information.

- Try to get involved in the orientation process at the installation level. Have a program representative go out to the units and brief them on what you have to offer. Provide maps so there is no chance for confusion as to where you are located. Offer a free tour of the facility (at no responsibility - some participants have the perception that you have to pay just to go into the centers). Give discount coupons to newcomer’s to encourage them to visit your facilities and see what you have to offer.

- Continue to send a representative to brief units regularly on program offerings.

- When promoting activities and events, consider all possible audiences that would be interested, such as retirees, family members, and civilian employees, if applicable.

- Focus promotional efforts on the activities offered. Use every avenue available and try to build word of mouth as your best tool. Turn your current customers into salespeople for you – if they’re pleased and satisfied, they’ll tell others! Encourage them to do so by offering them incentives. For every user that brings a non-user in, they get a free hour of time in the Center, etc.

-Focus on getting the word out about current activities and be open to considering offering new activities. Let users and potential users know that you're willing to offer new things if they are interested. Be flexible!

-Form advisory committees for idea generation and promotional tactics. Keep visibility high so patrons know whom to contact with ideas and suggestions. Get people involved – have them decide which activities to offer and let them help with execution, as well.

-Create a quarterly calendar of events for all of MWR (possibly with magnets to promote refrigerator posting) and be sure to distribute it through all available channels – in newcomer's packets, at in-processing, at formation, through on-post distribution, etc.

-Be sure to use the new avenues for getting the word out: the web sites and home pages for each installation, to promote all activities taking place in the Centers. Send information via e-mail, include information with leave and earnings statements, try new things, etc.

- Take the facilities to people – use high traffic areas such as the P/X or commissary to display completed projects and do demonstrations. Implement the use of a sample board with photos of projects completed at both Centers. Also consider participation in craft fairs, state fairs, bazaars, etc. This will give individuals a feel for what really can be accomplished and combat the "I don't know what they offer" excuse for not participating.

-Use BOSS representatives to help you spread the word amongst the single soldiers – they have regular meetings and can help you keep soldiers informed about your programs and activities.

\*Ask customers what they want in terms of programs/activities on a regular basis (much like we did with this project). This way, you'll ensure that they don't get bored with current offerings and new programs and activities will draw in more users and new users. Again, USACFSC may be able to provide assistance in this area.

## **ARTS AND CRAFTS FINDINGS**

### **GENERAL COMMENTS FROM USERS**

In general, comments were mainly positive from users, which one would expect. They are quite happy with the program, itself. A good representation of comments is displayed by the following:

-“It's nice.”

-“Great. Diversity of activities – framing, ceramics, woodshop, store.”

-“It's incredible.”

-“Wonderful, exceptional. Top of the line.”

However, even the users hinted at some of the problems befalling the program in general. These comments were heard throughout the groups, regardless of the installation, and a good representation follows:

- “The reason why the craft place is not being used as much, I don’t see any advertisement of what’s going on.”
- “Some posts have classes that they post of what’s upcoming and keep it highlighted, here it is almost like hidden.”
- “Need more people working there to enforce the rules.”
- “Rate it low, not because of the equipment, but because of the enthusiasm, no participation.”
- “Most people don’t know it’s there.”

## **GENERAL COMMENTS FROM NON-USERS**

Regardless of the installation, a total of 8% of the participants did not know that their installations even HAD an Arts and Crafts facility and an additional 13% knew that one existed, but did not know where it was located. That’s more than 1/5 of the population that couldn’t even identify the location of the program, much less what the program offerings are. Reasons for this lack of information ranged from receiving no MWR information at in-processing to a lack of advertising on the program manager’s part. The following comments typify this feeling:

- “I have no idea what they do in there at all.”
- “They need to do something to get the information out.”
- “They’ve gotta do something to get more people in here.”
- “Information isn’t filtered, we never see anything.”
- “Believe a lot of people don’t know it exists.”
- “I think people think it’s a place to go and make your own things, I don’t think they understand that it offers classes for you to learn.”

Another side effect of this lack of information is affecting approximately 6% of the participants. There is a small group that feel that the Arts and Crafts Center is only for females. The following comments typify this feeling:

- “It’s only for females and girly men.”
- “Mostly family members go actually to use the ceramics.”
- “A lot of females use it.”
- “There’s the impression that arts and crafts is just for family members without jobs (females).”
- “There are lots of single soldiers here, but none of them are at the center.”
- “Aren’t they women only classes?”
- “Mainly females go there, it’s not for guys.”
- “They offer things that women are more interested in.”

There is some awareness of programs offered at the Arts and Crafts Center by non-users. Ceramics, woodworking and framing were mentioned by a limited number of participants in each group. Usually, the knowledge of these programs comes through one or more

participants' having had to go to the Center to get plaques for their units, etc. However, even though they have not used the facility often, their comments are mainly positive:

-“Nice set-up, organized, people were friendly, enjoy yourself, they're there to help.

-“Things to buy are nice.”

-“Heard cost is good, kind of steep, but not compared to off post.

-“Good, very clean, people were nice. A nice place.”

### **PEOPLE LIKE TO GO TO THE ARTS AND CRAFTS CENTER...**

When asked if people like to go to the Arts and Crafts Center, users almost unanimously agreed. Reasons included: having fun, learning a new skill, participating in it as a social activity, making friends, saving money, enhancing their personal satisfaction and camaraderie.

### **THE ARTS AND CRAFTS CENTER OFFERS A LOT TO ITS PATRONS...**

When asked if the Arts and Crafts Center offers a lot to its patrons, again, users almost unanimously agreed. They talked about having the option to have things completed for you, or choosing to learn a new skill and complete projects on your own. They mentioned that learning these new skills was good for gift giving – rather than spending money on buying things as gifts, you save money by making the gifts yourself. They also raved about using the skills you learn in the center to decorate your home – everything from knick knacks to furniture and dinnerware were mentioned. The flexibility of a few of the shops was also mentioned, “They can take any idea you have for any crazy project, any shape, and they can make it work. They'll try new things and learn from you, you can work from a picture or build an idea in your mind and they'll work with you.”

Non-users were not quite as sure of their agreement with the statement. They talked about non-use or under-participation and that the facilities (while state of the art) were not being used to their full potential.

### **THE ARTS AND CRAFTS CENTER IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF LIFE...**

When asked if the Arts and Crafts Center was an important part of life at their installation, users agreed. They mentioned how essential the center was for all of the units who use it heavily for going away gifts - framing and plaques – and that it saves them a lot of money. They also credited the Center for the socializing aspect that it allows – people meet friends there and complete projects together. Although they recognized in general that the program is not being supported by the number of users that it could be, they still feel it is an essential contributor to quality of life. This is especially true during deployments. Users realize that when the soldiers go away, the spouses and families have an even greater need for the Center. The fact that participants may also acquire a second skill that they could turn into a money-maker in the future was also mentioned.



Non-users, although realizing that the Center is a benefit, were not nearly as convinced that it was an important part of quality of life. They admitted that for those who use it, it is most certainly important. But virtually none of them find it important to their own quality of life.

## **REASONS FOR NON-USE**

Non-users were asked to explain their non-use. As reported above, a small percentage didn't know the program existed and another didn't know where the facility was located. Reasons for this include lack of information at in-processing and lack of advertising by the Arts and Crafts Center, itself. Other reasons included not having enough time (being parents, working over-time, being in school), living too far away and just plain lack of interest. Another interesting comment by several active duty soldiers was the following: "I would love to do things, but if I do things, where would I put it. I live in a small room. Can't have a hobby, nowhere to put stuff. Already told we have too much stuff in our rooms." Another common sentiment shared by many young soldiers is, "Nobody likes being here, so you can't get excited about anything."

## **FREQUENCY OF USE**

Users are very stable in their usage patterns. While a few come every day and, conversely, a few come only once a month, the majority of users are participating on at least a weekly basis. Users at virtually all installations stated that the Center is never full, there is always plenty of space for everyone, and they would actually prefer it if there were more people in there. The opportunity to socialize and exchange techniques and ideas were the main reasons for this.

## **PARTICIPATION**

While users of the wood shop and frame shop in general participate in pretty static activities, those who use the ceramics shop are much more open to trying new and different things. This is not to say that those who participate in the wood shop and frame shop aren't doing different projects, just that they are not as open to new things as those who are participating in the ceramics shop activities. Ceramics users listed basket weaving, sewing, photography, pottery, engraving, computers, figurines, lapidary, stained glass, in fact, several stated that anything and everything would be of interest to them and they'd be willing to try anything new!

## **CLASSES**

Users stated that the offering of classes in general was too few and not diverse enough. They mentioned an orientation class to get an arts and crafts card and then the fact that each section may or may not offer their own classes. The woodworking shop requires an orientation at all installations, but participants did not feel it was worthwhile in most cases. One comment sums this feeling up: "Orientation is just bad, you just watch a video and there's no hands-on and then you're off to destroy the machinery." Other

classes that users have participated in include general framing classes, ceramics classes, porcelain doll classes, water coloring, pouring, and painting. A positive comment regarding classes was that they were offered much cheaper on post than off post. One reason given at an installation that doesn't offer much in the way of classes was that the personnel don't have enough time to teach classes – with only one person working, they can't teach and run the shop all at the same time.

## **FACILITY**

While users had some suggestions for minor improvements (need more room, need to repair ventilation, need to repair sinks), they were overwhelmingly positive about the facilities in general. The following comments mirror this feeling:

- “Great place.”
- “It is beyond a doubt the best Arts and Crafts shop that I have ever seen.”
- “Atmosphere gives you a feeling of warmth.”
- “It is fun, it is educational. It is relaxing.”
- “Facility is nice. It's being very well maintained.”

Non-users were also complimentary about the Arts and Crafts facilities, in general. Although non-users, several participants in these groups had visited the centers and used the words “nice, clean and organized” to describe them to other participants.

## **EQUIPMENT**

Users were quite happy with the equipment in the facilities in general. They spoke highly of both the quality and variety of equipment available at every center. They did have a few minor problems, though, revolving around aging equipment that is experiencing normal wear and tear and needs replacement.

## **STAFFING**

Users were overwhelmingly complimentary towards the staff in the centers in virtually every case. Negative comments were quite literally practically nonexistent. They used words like wonderful, super, nice, great, well-qualified, knowledgeable, helpful, available, flexible, courteous, energetic, patient, talented, experienced, well-rounded, and technically proficient to describe staff members. The only complaint that was heard was about the lack of staffing – in other words, the staff that are employed now are wonderful, but they need MORE staffing to handle the work.

## **HOURS OF OPERATION**

According to the users, the hours of operation are fine for virtually everyone. Most are closed Mondays and Tuesdays, but users realize that that's better than being closed Saturdays and Sundays. The belief that if there were more staff, they could be open more hours/days, prevails. Some spouses specified that they would prefer the centers be open in the mornings, and that there's a military focus on determining the hours. Heavy users,

as expected, would prefer longer hours. The fact that the centers used to be open for family time (Thursdays) was mentioned at a few sites and participants would like to see that practice renewed.

Non-users were unaware of the hours, as with other specifics about the program. Many couldn't even guess as to whether the facilities were open on the weekends or not, much less identify which hours they were open.

## **PRICES**

Users were very happy with the prices offered at the centers. One participant went so far as to say they were "the cheapest I have ever seen anywhere." Shop fees ranged from \$2 - \$3 and participants felt that these prices, along with those for materials were more than fair. The only complaint about pricing was in the wood shop, where several participants felt the price for wood was too high. A good example of the reasonable nature of on post prices was that mats in town would cost \$23 (\$10 at the center) and corners would be \$22 in town (\$10 at the center). That's a very beneficial cost savings for users.

## **PROGRAM INTEREST (users and non-users)**

The following are categories of activities identified by the CFSC Arts and Crafts Program Manager as those that could possibly be offered in any Arts and Crafts Center. Participants were shown the lists (at Appendix D) and asked to identify those that they would be most interested in participating in. The most popular activities, regardless of category, were photography, drawing/painting, computer graphics, air brush, gunsmithing, knife making, music, web site design and antique restoration. Activities are listed below in order of participant preference.

**-Fiber, Decoration and Special Crafts:** fly tying (18), leather crafts (18), interior design (17), candle making (11), flower arranging (11), book binding (8), needlecraft (6), soft sculpture (6), all of the above (5), basketry (4), kite building (4), sewing (4), tie dying (4), wearable art (4), country crafts (3), decorative painting (3), paper making (3), lamination (2), macrame (2), sewing (2), stitchery (2), loom (1), tapestry (1), tole painting (1), and vehicle upholstery (1).

**-Art, Metal and Jewelry:** knife making (32), engraving(20), electroplating (11), stone cutting/polishing (10), trophies (10), casting (5), all of the above (3), brass rubbings (3), cloisonne (2), enameling (2), fabrication repair (2), investment molds (1), jewelry (1), and lapidary (1).

**-Sculpture and 3D Design:** all of the above (24), blacksmithing (16), framing (9), clay (8), mold making (8), wood (8), metal (7), plastics (6), stone (6), fiberglass (3), pewter (3), brass (2), bronze (2), copper (2), plaster (2), aluminum (1), and silver (1).

**-Drawing and Painting:** all of the above (45), computer graphics (44), air brush (35), graphic design (9), calligraphy (8), water color (8), oil (6), murals (5), calligraphy (4), charcoal (4), print making (3), ink (2), lithography (2), pastels (2), acrylic (1), illustration (1), and wood cut (1).

**-Woodworking and Industrial Arts:** gunsmithing (34), antique restoration (25), all of the above (23), furniture repair (20), radio control models (19), small appliance repair (18), electronics (17), upholstery (17), toy making (14), wood carving (14), all of the above (12), cabinetry (9), furniture design (8), radio repair (8), boat building (7) and mill working.

**-Pottery and Ceramics:** glass making/forming (18), stained glass (18), glass etching (16), wheel throwing (9), porcelain (8), sandblasting (8), tile making (7), mosaics (6), glaze formation (5), mold making (5), raku (5), kiln building (4), lamination (4), all of them (2), glass making (2), and slips (1).

**-Photography:** all of the above (103), darkroom techniques (3), photo tours (3), black and white (2), video (2), color (1), film (1), lighting (1), photo restoration (1), scanner (1), and silkscreen (1).

**-Others:** There was at least minimal interest in almost everything mentioned. One comment seems to sum up the participants' attitudes: "I'd try anything. If we have it, we'll try it." The following suggestions garnered the most interest in addition to those mentioned above: music (30), web site design (27), landscaping (24), cinematography/video production/film making (19), home improvement (14), computer animation (12), wiring/electricity (10), creative writing (8), Internet classes (6), model aircraft (6), tattooing (4), cake decorating (3), cooking (3), digital photography (3), computer graphics (2), welding (2), beer making (1), clothing design (1), computer enhancing of photos (1), cross stitcher's guild (1), gardening (1), gliders/flying/parasailing (1), iron ons (1), quilter's guild (1), real estate (1), tool and dye (1), and touring (1).

There was a very high interest in computers in general in each of the groups held. While most installations stated that the Library and, in some cases, the Education Center did have computers that they might have access to, participants also stated that there were problems with these sources (long waiting lines, excessively short time limits, too few terminals available, etc.)

## **COMPARISONS TO OTHER INSTALLATIONS**

### **Fort Campbell Comments:**

-“We’re a little weak, needs improvement, others are cleaner.”

-“Better than overseas.”

-“We don’t have much, but doing good with what we got.”

-“Better than Redstone – this is a new facility.”

-“Alaska was immaculate and they asked us what kinds of molds we wanted.”

**Fort Drum Comments:**

- “Arts and crafts here is the best ever compared to others.”
- “If they shut it down, they’ll hear major gripes.”
- “From any other installation I have been on, none can compare to this one.”
- “Better than Riley or Germany – much better staff.”

**Fort Riley Comments:**

- “Compares pretty good with other ones I’ve been to – bigger than most, organized, nice once you go in, need to get a tour, though.”
- “Signage is bad – can’t see what it is.”
- “Personnel REAL good, excited about it.”
- “It is beyond a doubt the best Arts and Crafts shop that I have ever seen.”
- “Belvoir had no warmth. One of the best by far. Hood was unfriendly. I couldn’t believe the difference in the price at Belvoir to here. Belvoir was much more.”
- “Compared to Benning, ours teach better, are cheaper, are more patient and they follow up. Benning had a great atmosphere, though.”

**Fort Hood Comments:**

- “I say Fort Hood probably stands in my personal opinion second to none.”
- “I have never, ever seen a facility that can do what they’ve done here.”

**Fort Sill Comments:**

- “Best in the military.”
- “Next best center is in Stuttgart.”

## **ARTS AND CRAFTS RECOMMENDATIONS**

\*The number one complaint from both users and non-users regarding the Arts and Crafts program is that they don’t advertise well. Please refer to the General Recommendations section above for suggestions for improvement in this area.

-Promotion is especially important for the Arts and Crafts Center because of the relatively high percentage of participants that were unaware of even the existence of the program.

-Be sure to promote the “benefits” of using the Arts and Crafts Program as identified by the participants: having fun, saving money (making gifts and decorating your home), socializing opportunities, personal satisfaction and acquiring a skill that may become a second career after you separate. This may be something that CFSC can produce at the Headquarters and something that can be incorporated into in-processing.

-Be sure to promote the quality of the staff in the centers. Participants were overwhelmingly complimentary towards the staff – use this fact in your promotional materials.

\*Many participants (especially those heavily involved in the ceramics area) stated that they'd be willing to volunteer in the Centers if childcare were provided. Consider cross-promotion with the childcare centers or in getting certified childcare professionals to volunteer their time to care for children in the Center, itself, while their parents are participating.

\*Several participants in the wood and ceramics shops requested implementation of computer programs that can be used to peruse and get ideas for projects and cataloging programs so there would be access to different designs/patterns/molds/paints. USACFSC could identify which programs are out there and provide the information to the installations, who could purchase it individually. If the software and hardware option is too costly, then at a minimum, provide reference materials, books, magazines, and catalogs for customer use.

\*While users of the facilities are very happy with the quality and variety of equipment in the centers in general, there is some concern about normal wear and tear. Program managers need to ensure that the equipment is at peak condition and replace any worn parts, etc.

\*Attack the perception that the Arts and Crafts Center is only for females by offering classes targeted directly to men. Then promote these heavily, especially to the younger soldiers (with whom the perception lies).

\*Participants are looking for variety and diversity in program offerings, so managers should give them what they want as much as possible. Offer more variety/things don't have to be permanent/do things on a quarterly basis/find more teachers for different things. Offer classes over the lunch hour, in the evenings and on weekends – find out which pulls the most response and let that determine your schedule. Use this variety of offerings to attack the “nothing to do, so we can't get excited about anything” attitude of some of the younger soldiers.

\*Capitalize on the fact that there is a very high interest in computers in general. For those installations that have already installed computer access, promote it. For those that haven't, consider it.

\*Look for volunteers to help out or teach classes in every place possible. Check with AFTB, OWC, and other organizations on post. You never know what hidden talents may reside on your installation unless you ask!

\*There is a huge concern with parents over having sufficient programs offered for children, especially during the summer months when they're not in school. Offer summer programs for kids of varying ages – finger painting for the younger children, ceramics for the teenagers, etc. Use children's art for calendars and promotional items.

\*Participants that may not have used the facility before have an “I have to try it, before I know if I like it” attitude. Cater to this by offering newcomer's coupons that allow a one

time free session or class. Offer tours to units to let them get familiar with the offerings/programs.

\*The one suggestion that garnered the most support from the younger soldiers was that of offering college credit for courses: “We would love it and it would get junior soldiers to go.”

\*The younger soldiers also complained of lack of transportation. Look into the possibility of offering transportation to and from the barracks for special classes. This may increase participation (especially at those locations where the barracks are a long distance from the Center).

\*Although not specifically related to the Arts and Crafts Center, itself, the interest level in high adventure activities is extremely high among the younger soldiers. They are looking for sky diving, hang gliding, scuba diving, high altitude sports, etc. Any ideas incorporating these activities with the Center would be favorably received by participants.

\*Re-look wood prices. While not true of every installation, several participants complained of unusually high prices for wood in the wood shop.

\*Charge people a minimal fee (\$1-\$2) to clean their molds if they don’t want to do it themselves. This could be a money maker and could save on some of the wear and tear of materials if they are cleaned properly on a regular basis.

## **AUTOMOTIVE SKILLS FINDINGS**

### **GENERAL COMMENTS FROM USERS**

The average age of the cars owned by those in the Automotive Skills groups was 8 years old. Very few participants (even though some were what might be considered heavy users) see the Automotive Skills Center work that they do as a “hobby.” With a very few exceptions, they see it more as a necessity or a necessary evil.

Users were very complimentary of the Automotive Skills Centers, in general. Participants used words like outstanding, trustworthy, and knowledgeable when describing the Automotive Skills Center. The trustworthiness issue was by far one of the most important. One participant describes an incidence where an outside shop gave him an estimate of \$500-\$600 to repair his vehicle and the Automotive Skills Center charged him just \$160. The trustworthiness issue is also a great relief when soldiers are deployed – they feel that they can trust the Automotive Skills Center to treat their spouses the same way they treat the soldiers. Several participants were users, but admittedly not mechanically inclined. They stated that the Center did the work for them – everything from an oil change to body work and they were happy with the work that was done. The only complaint was that there was no warranty on any work completed there. Also, in

these situations, they praised the Center for being honest with time estimates (as well as cost estimates). Cost savings was another very positive aspect for the Automotive Skills Center users. Mention of the social aspect of the Center was also made – provides a social network for participants that otherwise might be lacking.

### **GENERAL COMMENTS FROM NON-USERS**

Approximately 5% of participants didn't know that the Automotive Skills Center even existed and an additional 5% could not identify where it was located. Those who were aware of the Center and had been there identified uses as changing tires, rotating tires, changing oil, changing brakes, changing shocks and other basic maintenance. Many participants have a very low knowledge level when it comes to cars as evidenced by this comment, "I only know how to put gas in my car." There was some confusion among the non-users as to whether or not assistance was available. While approximately half of the non-users were aware that employees were available to assist you, the other half were not aware of this. There was significant interest among non-users of the "garage" idea – "I would use it if I knew I could drop off my car, have them fix it, and pick it up, like the garage downtown."

### **PEOPLE LIKE TO GO TO THE AUTOMOTIVE SKILLS CENTER...**

When asked if people like to go to the Automotive Skills Center, users agreed wholeheartedly. Although very few admitted to "liking" to have to work on their car or have someone else work on it, they agreed with liking to go to the Center as opposed to having to take their vehicle off post. Even non-users have heard positive comments from users, so they agreed in general with the statement as well.

### **THE AUTOMOTIVE SKILLS CENTER OFFERS A LOT TO ITS PATRONS...**

When asked if the Automotive Skills Center offers a lot to its patrons, users again agreed. They stated that one could do everything there – basic maintenance, collision repair, body work, painting, etc. Users believe that they have everything in the Center than one might need, and if, in fact, they didn't have something, they would provide you with a resource to tag into it or refer you to someone downtown.

### **THE AUTOMOTIVE SKILLS CENTER IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF LIFE...**

When asked if the Automotive Skills Center is an important part of life, practically all of the participants agreed. The following comment sums up the attitude held by most participants, "Absolutely. Without them, I would be walking." Even non-users and infrequent users felt that, even though they are not heavy users, it is important that it be there as an inexpensive option as opposed to having to go downtown. This fact was reiterated especially when the subject of deployment came up. Soldiers feel better knowing their spouses can take the car to the Automotive Skills Center and don't have to deal with off post sources. They trust the Automotive Skills Center and know that they will not take advantage of their families. The fact that soldiers are not allowed to work



on their cars in barracks/housing was also brought up as another reason that the Automotive Skills Center is very important. One participant went so far as to state that “If it closes, it’ll be like losing a friend.”

## **REASONS FOR NON-USE**

Again, as with the Arts and Crafts Center, lack of advertising was pegged as the number one reason why people don’t use the Automotive Skills Center. Participants claim that once they in-brief, that’s it – no MWR programs are publicized. Non-users have other reasons for being so: they don’t have cars, they have no interest in working on their cars (not a hobby), or they feel they don’t know enough about cars to work on their own.

## **FREQUENCY OF USE**

While there are a very few participants who regularly frequent the Automotive Skills Center (weekly or monthly), most are much more infrequent (“twice a year,” “when I need to change my oil,” or “only when I break down.”). Again, these participation levels are due to the fact that very few people see working on their cars as a “hobby,” rather, to most, it is a necessary evil.

## **PARTICIPATION**

Participants stated that they’ve done the following in the Automotive Skills Center: basic maintenance and repair, change oil, painting, rotate tires, change brakes, auto machine schematics, body work, transmission work, you can do anything there, really.

## **CLASSES**

None of the installations visited were offering any classes other than the basic course to get certified to use the equipment. Interest in classes was quite high, however, as stated later in the report.

## **FACILITY**

Participants were extremely satisfied with the Automotive Skills facilities in general across all installations. They described them as clean, well-lit, secure, state of the art, money savers, great, top notch, beautiful, and well-maintained. There were virtually no negative comments about the Automotive Skills facilities in any of the groups held.

## **EQUIPMENT**

Participants were just as happy with the equipment at the Automotive Skills facilities. One participant sums up the opinion of most by saying, “The equipment is good, of good variety, of high quality and they have enough of it.” They were complimentary of the equipment in general and the fact that it was up to date/diagnostic. There was, as stated

earlier, some concern over the age of the tools. Although they are of high quality, the sheer number of uses requires that some of them be replaced.

## **STAFFING**

Staff comments are not as glowing in the Automotive Skills area as they were in Arts and Crafts. While most participants were complimentary of the staff, using descriptors such as helpful, top notch, professional, phenomenally friendly, great, customer oriented, trustworthy, and qualified, others were not as positive in their opinions of the staff. Some participants complained that the mechanics can't answer questions; that they have an attitude; that they want to charge you to do the work for you, not help you; that they ignore you; and that some know you are doing it wrong and just watch you mess up.

## **HOURS OF OPERATION**

The majority of participants felt that the hours of operation are very convenient. A few would like to see later hours, especially on weekends.

## **PRICES**

Participants were overwhelmingly positive about the price structure at the Automotive Skills Center. They described using the Center as a good deal, very reasonable, decent, great, competitive, and can't be beat. When the subject changed to materials or having the Center do the work for them, though, the comments were not as positive. "I don't buy materials there. I can call around and find them cheaper," was a common comment.

## **COMPARISONS TO OTHER INSTALLATIONS**

### **Fort Campbell Comments:**

- "This one far surpasses Redstone."
- "I would rather go back to Korea, there's more to do over there/offer more."
- "Eustis had nothing, so this is definitely better."
- "It's bigger here than Europe, but it's all the same stuff, really."

### **Fort Drum Comments:**

- "It's better than Riley, Germany or Kentucky – it's more modern"
- "Hawaii was the best – they had 4 shops and I used them all."

### **Fort Riley Comments:**

- "Is great, they do the work for you here."
- "Auto bays are too small here, especially on the side – better at other installations."
- "They don't give you as much guidance here as other places I've been."

**Fort Hood Comments:**

- “I’ve had bad experiences here as opposed to other places.”
- “They’re good with general maintenance here.”

**Fort Sill Comments:**

- “Riley was better, they’d do the work for you, they’re good.”
- “There’s a lot of unused capacity in this shop now.”

## **AUTOMOTIVE SKILLS RECOMMENDATIONS**

\*Again, as with the Arts and Crafts Center discussions, lack of promotion was high on the list for participants as a negative comment. One participant sums up the feeling by saying, “They need to get the information to me, don’t make me go looking for it.” Please refer to the General Recommendations section for suggestions on this topic.

-Promotion is especially important for the Automotive Skills Center because of the relatively high percentage of participants that were unaware of even the existence of the program.

-Be sure to promote the “benefits” of the Automotive Skills Program as outlined by the participants: cost savings, trustworthiness, and knowledge of the staff. This may be something that CFSC can produce at the Headquarters and something that can be incorporated into in-processing.

-Promote the fact that assistance is available at the Center. Many participants feel uncomfortable about their skill level and need to know that one-on-one, hands-on assistance is there for them. Many stated that they need someone who has the patience to explain things to them one-on-one.

\*Hands down, the most often suggested improvement given by participants was allowing them to schedule appointments for Automotive Skill employees to fix their cars – they make an appointment, drop off their car, pick it up when it’s done, and pay for it, but pay much less than they would have downtown. “As long as it’s cheaper than going off post, we’ll use it.” This may be an area that USACFSC needs to focus on getting approval for across the board at all installations.

\*Participants are definitely interested in classes. Topics of interest included basic maintenance (the most popular, with 40 stating interest in things like changing the oil, changing the brakes, tune ups, transmission fluid change, alignment, etc.), customization (gold plating/chroming) (29), sun roofs (10), body work (9), bed liners (6), classes on new cars (5), painting (5), stereo installation (5), transmission repair (5), tune ups on motorcycles and lawn mowers (5), welding (5), electrical systems (4), engine rebuilding (4), theft prevention (4), A/C (3), alarms (3), car restoration (3), graphic designs (removable) (3), designing personal plates (1), driving courses (1), emissions (1), rear

axle work (1), suspension (1), train me to get a license to be a mechanic (1), and women's car care classes (1).

\*Participants suggested they would prefer more flexibility in the offering of the mandatory class. They'd like to see it offered on the evenings or during lunch in addition to being offered on weekends.

\*As with the Arts and Crafts Center, participants were VERY interested in the idea of getting college credit for participation. Again, this could be something that USACFSC could assist with.

\*Need more parts on hand and need to be cheaper than off post in the parts store to satisfy customer demand. Re-look parts pricing to ensure that prices are fair and reasonable.

\*Be sure that all employees are trained in customer service procedures. Many comments from the focus groups indicated that employees could use improvement in this area. Managers must make customer service a priority and must continually reinforce this belief with their employees. Excellent customer service is an intangible benefit to the Automotive Skills Center. If customers are happy with the service they receive, they will want to come back.

## **CLOSING COMMENTS**

The overriding concern of the active duty participants across all of the groups conducted is that of eroding benefits. The following comments sum up the feeling very well:

- “We need to fight to keep these things open.”
- “There's nothing to do here but MWR.”
- “Don't take any more slices or cuts.”
- “The Army is taking away a lot of benefits and the reasons for staying are going away - making it undesirable.”
- “Increased costs are prohibitive as is services being eliminated.”

Virtually all of the participants see both the Arts and Crafts Center and the Automotive Skills Center as BENEFITS, even if they don't use them. The challenge for these programs is to stay in touch with the needs of the customers and potential customers, expand offerings as much as possible and focus on increasing usage and, therefore, revenue. This will do more to ensure their survival than any other tactic.

Users of the Arts and Crafts and Automotive Skills Programs are the program manager's best potential promotional tools. They are avid supporters of the programs and should be enlisted to encourage others to try the program offerings, which will increase participation, and hopefully, the bottom line.

Most of the actions included in this report lie in the hands of the program managers at the installations. This is to be expected to a certain extent, because they are closest to the program, itself, and can affect change better than anyone at the Headquarters level. However, there are some specific actions that the USACFSC program managers can do to assist installation managers. One suggestion that may help in this process is surveying the installation program managers to allow them to express their beliefs as to what type of assistance will be most useful to them.

In closing, one very positive thing that wasn't really an objective of doing the focus groups, but will benefit the programs, is that some of the non-users who attended the groups will now visit the facilities, if for no other reason than curiosity. Interest was sparked in these non-users by virtue of the discussions held and hopefully, they will see the benefits offered by the programs and be converted into users.

## **APPENDIX A**

## **APPENDIX B**

## **APPENDIX C**



## **APPENDIX D**